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Articles in Today's Clips

Friday, July 28, 2006

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07/27/2006

MSP-DHS training program a good start

The Huron Daily Tribune

The Department of Human Services and Michigan State Police are forming a partnership of sorts that should benefit children in our state.

Officials announced Wednesday that starting this fall the state police will train the state's child protection workers. Specifically, the state police will arm workers with enhanced interviewing skills when it comes to child abuse investigations.

By the end of next year child protection workers everywhere in Michigan will have completed the training. State police plan to share their interview techniques, provide tips for writing reports and pass on a checklist workers can use when they are investigating whether abuse occurred in a home.

According to an Associated Press story, more than 75,000 abuse investigations are conducted each year. That makes for a tough caseload for child protection workers, to be sure. The more advanced training we can provide them to better assess situations amid murky and tense circumstances, the better.

There is nothing more important than the safety and well being of our children. And if as a society we are going to proclaim them our future, then we need to treat them as such. We owe it to our children, our future, to find better ways to get to the truth of the matter in abuse investigations — more quickly. This training program would seem to be a good start.

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Children's protective workers get new training

Updated: July 28, 2006, 08:56 AM EDT

GRAND RAPIDS - The Michigan State Police will begin training children's protective services workers in enhanced investigation training.

It's part of an effort to reform Michigan's child welfare system. All case workers will be required to spot danger signs in the children they oversee. The new program will allow for more thorough investigations and result in more informed decisions on individual cases.

State police will teach case workers improved interview techniques, how to use an evidence checklist and other new elements.



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Social workers to learn techniques from state police

LANSING, Mich. Child protection workers across Michigan will be trained by the state police to improve interview techniques used to evaluate whether abuse has occurred inside homes.

Department of Human Services Director Marianne Udow and State Police Director Colonel Peter Munoz say the training will start this fall, and all protective services workers should be trained by the end of next year.

Law enforcement will provide social workers with more detailed checklists to use in homes where allegations of abuse have been filed, along with training on how to conduct interviews and write reports.

Udow says state police already have conducted a pilot program with social workers in Saginaw County, and the response was positive.

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Article published Jul 27, 2006

Woman says son lying about rape

By Lisa Roose-Church
DAILY PRESS & ARGUS

While a Livingston County judge ruled there is enough evidence to send the Tyrone Township father accused of raping and beating his then-12-year-old son to trial, the boy's mother said she believes the boy is lying.

Livingston County District Judge L. Suzanne Geddis closed the courtroom during the boy's testimony, which included graphic descriptions of at least 14 separate sexual assaults he claims were committed in May by his father, Daniel Sanford Tesen, 35.

In making her ruling, Geddis repeated some of the now 13-year-old boy's testimony, which also included statements that his father threatened to kill him if he told anyone about the alleged abuse.

The boy also testified that his father placed his hands on hot chicken on a grill, burning his hands to the point that they blistered, and that his father choked him or beat him in the abdomen during the sexual assaults and that sometimes he could not tell his father to stop because he could not breathe.

Howell defense attorney Mack Spickard declined to comment on Geddis' decision or the teen's testimony.

"We anticipate there will be a trial and the truth will prevail," Spickard said.

After the teen testified, Geddis walked him out of the courtroom to a group of supporters whom the teen eagerly hugged.

The alleged incidents came to light in May after the boy, who previously lived in Las Vegas with his mother, passed a note that he was being abused by his father to one of the neighbor's children. The neighbor child gave the note to his parents, who called 911.

The boy's mother, Heather Noles, said Wednesday during a telephone interview from her Las Vegas home that she does not believe the allegations.

Noles claims her son had a similar story in Las Vegas. She says he went to a friend's home, where he made allegations that his stepfather "punched him the face 20 times and knocked him out."

Las Vegas Child Protective Services' agents investigated and were not able to substantiate the teen's claims, Noles said, noting that her son also stole hundreds of dollars from his mother, stepfather and friends. It was this incorrigible behavior, she said, that led her to send the boy to his father.

"He's doing the same thing (in Michigan) he did here," Noles said.

Noles believes her son added the sexual abuse allegations to his story of physical abuse to make it more believable and to get the results he did not achieve in Las Vegas — to get his own way.

"I truly believe the way my son manipulated and lied in this household, he would do anything to get what he wants," Noles said. "As much as that breaks my heart, I believe it. He's my son. ... I hope he gets help. I hope someone can reach him the way I couldn't."

Noles said she has terminated her parental rights to her son because she cannot allow him back into her home for the safety of her three daughters, ages 17 months, 3 and 7.

The 13-year-old is in the custody of the Livingston County Department of Human Services.

Tesen is charged with one count each of distributing obscene matter to a child, third-degree child abuse and truancy for failing to send his son to school.

After the preliminary exam, Assistant Prosecutor Daniel Rose amended the original charges to include five additional counts of

first-degree criminal sexual conduct for a total of 14 counts.

The criminal sexual conduct charges are punishable by up to life in prison.

ClickOnDetroit.com

Mother Charged In Child's Drowning

POSTED: 5:40 pm EDT July 26, 2006
UPDATED: 5:44 pm EDT July 26, 2006

The Wayne County prosecutor has charged a Brownstown Township mother in the death of her 11 month old daughter.

The toddler died after drowning in the family pool last month.

The mother has been charged with involuntary manslaughter and child abuse, prosecutors said.

The mother will be arraigned on Thursday.

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ClickOnDetroit.com

Mother Arraigned In Toddler's Drowning

Girl Drowned In Family Pool

POSTED: 4:34 pm EDT July 27, 2006

UPDATED: 7:08 pm EDT July 27, 2006

A Brownstown Township mother was arraigned Thursday on charges in connection with the drowning of her 11-month-old daughter.

Lisa Garner (pictured), 28, is charged with involuntary manslaughter and second-degree child abuse in connection with the June 27 drowning of death of her daughter in their family pool, according to Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy. The girl drowned at about 9:36 a.m. at the family's home on Charles Drive, according to Worthy.

The toddler is believed to have crawled through an open door and fallen into the pool, according to earlier Local 4 reports.

Bond for Garner was set at \$7,500.

Involuntary manslaughter carries a maximum penalty of 15 years in prison. Second-degree child abuse carries a maximum penalty of four years in prison, according to Worthy.

Previous Stories:

- July 26, 2006: [Mother Charged In Child's Drowning](#)
- June 27, 2006: [Toddler Drowns In Pool](#)

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Merritt man charged with child sexually abusive activity

By Matt Whetstone, Cadillac News

July 28, 2006

CADILLAC - Police arrested a 45-year-old Merritt man Tuesday for allegedly using the Internet to sexually solicit what he believed to be a teenager.

Robert Richard Vanderwall was arraigned Wednesday in 84th District Court for child sexually abusive material, communicating through a computer to commit child sexually abusive activity and two counts of using a computer to distribute obscene material to a minor.

On several occasions, Michigan Attorney General Mike Cox alleges that Vanderwall, a self-employed cab driver, chatted with an undercover officer posing as a minor. Police arrested Vanderwall when he came to Cadillac to meet with the child, Cox's office said.

"Internet predators seek out kids far too often," Cox said. "My office will continue to track down these predators to ensure that they are kept away from Michigan's children."

Cox's Child and Public Protection Unit has arrested 97 Internet sexual predators since its restructuring.

Michigan State Police from the Cadillac Post assisted in the arrest.

Lt. David Street, Cadillac Post Commander, said Internet crimes have been increasingly problematic for police in the past few years.

"It's obviously really hard for us to tell how many out there are preying on young people," Street said. "Is it an issue? By all means - one victim is too many."

Parents must be aware of their children's activities online, Street said, because young boys and girls may not understand there are people preying on them. Street suggests using programs that monitor or lockout certain online activity.

Citizens can report suspected Internet child predators via the Report Internet Abuses Against Children link at www.mich.gov/ag or by calling (313) 456-0180.

mwhetstone@cadillacnews.com | 775-NEWS (6397)



Hearing adjourned

Thursday, July 27, 2006

ALLEGAN -- A hearing for a 26-year-old mother charged with failing to protect her four children from felony child abuse was adjourned Wednesday until Aug. 30 in 57th District Court. Frederick Jensen Jr., an attorney representing Melissa Rupert, said he requested the adjournment to gather more information. Rupert's father-in-law, Ronald Rupert, 56, was sentenced earlier this month to 23 to 50 years in prison for abusing Melissa Rupert's children, and three children from another family who shared their Valley Township residence. Rupert's husband, James Rupert, 26, and Isaac Kelly, 74, who is grandfather to the children of the other family, also are charged.

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Youth committed to human services

Published: Friday, July 28, 2006

By PATTY RAMUS

Alpena News

A 14-year-old juvenile who pleaded guilty to voluntary manslaughter in June for the shooting death of his father was committed to the Michigan Department of Human Services Thursday afternoon during his disposition at the Family Division of the 23rd Circuit Court.

On Feb. 1, Mark Link, 45, of Glennie was pronounced dead at Saint Joseph Hospital in Tawas after being shot at a camper located approximately 50 yards from his parents' house at 4334 Frasher Road in Glennie.

Judge James Cook ruled an indefinite amount of time for detention, DHS will decide the juvenile's placement and the juvenile will return to the Midland County Juvenile Detention Facility for the time period DHS deems necessary. The juvenile's mother must undergo counseling and the juvenile is responsible for a \$2,000 payment to the Crime Victim's Rights Commission.

Guardianship was terminated and custody was given back to the juvenile's mother. Every 90 days the juvenile will have to appear for review on his progress.

"You did something that was reprehensible," Cook told the juvenile

Thomas Weichel, Alcona County prosecuting attorney, requested the court to follow recommendations of juvenile officer Tamyra Ranger to commit the juvenile to DHS for a specified period of time.

"It's about the most severe the judge could have ordered," Weichel said of Cook's ruling

Laura Frawley, the juvenile's attorney, requested the court follow the DHS's recommendations and for the juvenile to be placed in a low detention facility.

Frawley said she and her client knew he would have to see detention because of his crime.

"It's probably a good place for him because he doesn't have a stable environment to go to," she said.

Members of the victim's family gave impact statements before the ruling.

"Every time you get angry I want you to remember the look on your dad's face when you pulled the trigger," said a cousin of the victim.

The victim's brother told the juvenile he would never be able to forgive him for the crime.

The juvenile gave his own statement in which he apologized to the family and said he was sorry for his actions.

“If I could go back in time I would have found a different solution,” he said.

Frawley said the youth can be held in detention until age 21 depending on his progress and the type of program. She would like to see him get into a boot camp after his program to help him learn more life skills, she added.

Patty Ramus can be reached via e-mail at pramus@thealpenanews.com or by phone at 354-3111 ext. 345.



THE BAY CITY TIMES

Teen asks family to forgive him for shooting his father

Friday, July 28, 2006

By **ERIC ENGLISH**

TIMES WRITER

HARRISVILLE - Speaking in a soft, barely audible voice, a

13-year-old Glennie boy stood in an Alcona County courtroom Thursday asking forgiveness for shooting his own father to death.

"Grandpa, I'm sorry for what I've done," the teenager said. "If I could go back in time, I wouldn't have done it.

"I hope you guys can forgive me," he told his relatives, many overcome with tears during the emotional afternoon court hearing.

The teen appeared in Alcona's Family Court for the equivalent of a sentencing hearing on Thursday. Charged as a juvenile, he pleaded guilty in June to voluntary manslaughter in the Feb. 1 shooting death of 46-year-old Mark A. Link.

The Times is withholding the youth's name because he is in the juvenile justice system.

Probate Judge James Cook ordered the teen to serve an indefinite period of detention as ordered by the state Department of Human Services. Cook ordered the teen to remain in the Midland juvenile detention center until the state agency determines where he should be placed.

By law, he could be held in secure detention until the age of 21. Family members said the boy would mark his 14th birthday today. Relatives of the teen and his father expressed conflicting emotions about the case.

"I'm dumbfounded by the whole situation," said Chris Link, of Mikado, the half-brother of the teenager.

"I don't think he understands the impact he's had on our family. Instead of going outside and kicking a tree, he grabbed a gun and shot my father," Link said.

Others had harsher words for the teen, who sat impassively as they spoke to him from just a few feet away.

"I will never, ever forgive you for what you did," said Michael Link, the brother of Mark Link. "One day you'll get out, but one thing I want you to remember is that you'll always be a murderer."

The boy's grandfather, Clifford Link, said he still loved both his grandson and his son. At the time of the shooting, Mark Link and his son were living in a trailer adjacent to Clifford Link's home and the teen was a seventh grader at Oscoda Area Schools.

Clifford Link said his son was still alive when the ambulance arrived at the scene and he gave him a hug before being taken for treatment.

Prosecutors theorized that the boy shot his father in part due to an abusive family environment, and it appeared the teen and his father had argued the night before the shooting.

Relatives rejected the abuse claims, however, stating that Mark Link was known to yell a lot, but never struck his son out of fear that he would lose custody of him.

In addition to ordering detention for the teen, Judge Cook said the teen would have to pay \$2,000 to his half-brother as restitution.

Cook also ordered the teenager's mother to reimburse the state for court costs and to attend counseling and parenting classes.

"Let's hope this never happens again to any other family," Cook said.

- Eric English covers regional news for The Times. He can be reached at 1-800-727-7661 or by e-mail at eenglish@bc-times.com.

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Couple charged with harboring runaway

Of The Oakland Press

WATERFORD TWP. - A Waterford Township couple and their son were charged Wednesday with harboring a teenage runaway who had been missing for two years.

Ethel and Gary Swan, 61, and their son Anthony Swan, 20, were arraigned before 51st District Court Judge Phyllis McMillen on charges of harboring a runaway, a 1-year misdemeanor. Police say the girl was 15 when she ran away from her Ortonville home. She's now 17 and was home-schooled by Ethel Swan, 59, while living in their home, said Ed Cibor, chief of warrants for the Oakland County Prosecutor's Office.

According to police and prosecutors, the girl - whose name is not being released - ran away from home in October 2004. She was allegedly upset that her father was planning to move out of state, Cibor said. The girl was acquainted with the Swans and, more than once, the trail led detectives to their Waterford Township home, where the family denied the girl was there.

"It is a tragedy an adult would intentionally put another family through the hell of not knowing whether their missing child is dead or alive for almost two years," said Oakland County Sheriff Michael Bouchard. "As a parent, I find it incredibly upsetting."

There was no evidence the girl had been abused, and the exact reason the Swans decided to hide her for so long remains unknown.

"It's tough to answer something that's so totally wrong," Bouchard said. "But they went out of their way to thwart us."

Detectives in the Brandon Township substation never gave up on the case and tracked down several leads. In June 2005, investigators went again to the Swan residence after someone spotted the girl in the community. At the time, the deputies were threatened by the Swans with legal action if they did not stop harassing the family. The girl was in the house.

Bouchard said authorities at the time tried to get a warrant but did not have enough evidence.

The break in the case came July 14, when the girl's grandfather heard her voice at a Waterford Township dollar store and called authorities. The girl's hair had been dyed blonde and Ethel Swan allegedly told investigators that the girl was her daughter, saying the girl's name was Kaylee Valentine.

"More than once, these people willfully, intentionally and aggressively obstructed the investigation of law enforcement," Bouchard said. "It is

stunning and wrong. They stole precious time and ruined too many lives for too long."

Bouchard said the girl is in custody for truancy and will receive counseling. She has allegedly told investigators that the Swans did not hold her against her will and gave her religion and an education.

"This is a bizarre case," he said.

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Official says juvenile home 'falling apart'

Thursday, July 27, 2006

By Cedric Ricks

cricks@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8557

Seventy years ago, what is now the Kalamazoo County Juvenile Home opened as an orphanage. Later it was used to house runaways, school truants and incorrigible youths.

Now the aging facility, 1424 Gull Road, houses youths with histories of assaultive behavior, sex offenses, drug abuse and mental illness.

"We have a different population nowadays," said Frank Weichlein, the home's superintendent. "These kids are a little tougher, and they commit much more serious offenses."

Replacement of the juvenile home goes before Kalamazoo County voters Aug. 8, in the form of a \$28.3 million bond proposal.

If the bond is approved, the county would build a 64-bed facility with 40 detention beds, 16 long-term treatment beds and eight beds for intake and assessment of youths.

If the juvenile home tax is approved, property taxes would be raised by 0.2654 of a mill in 2007 and then by an estimated 0.1728 of a mill, on average, for up to 25 years to retire the bond.

For the owner of an average home in Kalamazoo County, with a market value of \$138,310 and with a taxable value of \$56,991, the tax increase would be about \$15 in 2007.

Weichlein, along with other county officials and residents who back a new juvenile home, met with Kalamazoo Gazette editors and reporters Wednesday to promote the upcoming juvenile home millage.

"It's an old design and the building is falling apart," Weichlein said.

Two schools run by the Kalamazoo Regional Educational Service Agency operate out of the juvenile home and have limited classroom space. One of the schools is for residents of the facility and the other for children who live in the community but are under court supervision.

County Administrator Don Gilmer said a new juvenile home would be constructed adjacent to the current facility on Gull Road -- an area that currently includes some parking spaces and part of a recreational area for juvenile home youths -- and could be open in late 2008 or early 2009.

Construction of a parking deck and conversion of nearby parcels of land into recreational space might not be completed until the fall of 2009, Gilmer said.

A new juvenile home would allow youths to be separated based on need and background, compared to existing conditions that allow emotionally disturbed teens, sex offenders, victims of sex offenses and youths of various ages to interact freely, Weichlein said.

Last year, the juvenile home served 425 youths and recorded 1,048 admissions. Weichlein said about 30 to 40 youths each year are sent to other residential facilities, mainly out of state, for long-term treatment to change behaviors and attitudes. Those placements currently cost Kalamazoo County from \$150 to \$300 a day.

With 16 long-term treatment beds, a new juvenile home would allow many youths to stay in Kalamazoo,

where officials say they can be treated more effectively and efficiently because their families and the community can play a larger role in treatment.

Money spent out-of-state also could be redirected locally, and the juvenile home is expecting to use those funds to hire 14 additional staff to help youths, Weichlein said.

Dan McGlinn, a Kalamazoo County commissioner and part of a citizen campaign for the new juvenile home, said the juvenile home is kind of the last stop in the juvenile-justice system and needs to have adequate resources to help troubled youths.

"These are your most damaged kids, and we are sticking them in a 1936 facility that was built as an orphanage, and we are expecting good results," McGlinn said.

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Published July 28, 2006

Juvenile millage: Ingham County voters should renew funds for treatment

On the ballot

- Ingham County voters are asked to renew 0.6 of a mill for a period of five years, 2007-2011.

A Lansing State Journal editorial

Four years ago, Ingham County voters approved a millage to finance juvenile justice programs.

Four years ago, the LSJ Editorial Board opposed that millage.

Now, the county is back with a request to renew the 0.6 of a mill for five years.

Now, we recommend residents vote yes on the Ingham County juvenile justice millage.

The difference in these four years has been how Ingham County has made use of the millage funds - by emphasizing alternatives to incarcerations and treatment for troubled youth. Such spending now should save money later, if young lives can be turned from crime and into productive pursuits.

Thanks to the millage, Ingham County courts now have options that extend past incarceration or the shipment of troubled teen girls to out-of-state facilities. Meanwhile, crowding at local facilities has been reduced and the county is working more closely with the families of juvenile offenders to get at the heart of their behavior.

In 2004, a study by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse found that nearly 80 percent of arrested juveniles had used illegal drugs or alcohol, but fewer than 4 percent were getting treatment. Simply locking away juvenile offenders doesn't solve a problem, but only delays - or even worsens - it.

This isn't to say teens don't need structure. In fact, Ingham County is looking to augment its treatment work by establishing a day treatment center. That's one of the reasons the county is seeking a millage renewal.

Based on this performance, we think Ingham County residents are getting their money's worth out of this millage. They should continue the bargain by renewing it on Aug. 8.

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Autopsy inconclusive in teen's death

Thursday, July 27, 2006

By John Agar

The Grand Rapids Press

WALKER -- Police continue to investigate the death of a 16-year-old girl whose body was found near Grand Rapids' Richmond Park nine days after she went missing.

Grand Rapids police found the body of Amber Koomen on Monday in Walker, near Richmond Street NW and Bristol Avenue.

An autopsy this week proved inconclusive, with toxicology tests incomplete, but police are treating her death as suspicious because of her age, and the fact her body was found in a secluded location.

Walker is the lead investigative agency because the body was found within its city limits, along the Grand Rapids border. Grand Rapids police were investigating because its officers took the initial missing-person complaint.

Police believe Amber had gone to that area on July 16, the night before she was reported missing.

Police were not acting on new information when they found the body but had been looking in the area for some time, concerned about her disappearance, Detective Sgt. Chris Postma said.

Police said Koomen had run away from home before.

Restricted criteria

Her disappearance did not trigger an Amber Alert, in which police provide information to media statewide when a child is believed to be in serious danger.

State police Sgt. Gregory Jones, who oversees the five-year program, did not know circumstances of this case but said the alert is activated only under strict conditions: essentially, when police determine a child is in serious risk of severe injury.

If an alert is issued, it needs to occur soon after a child is missing because studies have shown bad things usually happen within the first three hours, Jones said. He said such strict criteria is required under the program -- a voluntary partnership between law enforcement and media -- because so many children, as many as 2,000, are reported missing in Michigan every year.

"If you activate (in every case), you'd have Amber Alerts every minute of the day," he said.

"We don't want this to become the 'Little Boy Who Cried Wolf.'"

Serious business

Even if an alert is not issued, local police will respond to any report of missing children -- and investigate quickly.

"In law enforcement, we do everything we can, even in a runaway case," Jones said.

"We know bad things happen to children out on the street. They're victimized and exposed to risks."

Send e-mail to the author: jagar@grpress.com

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Home care workers get aid from state

[Chad Dally](#), Staff Writer
Hillsdale Daily News

A campaign stretching back to January to boost wages for home health care workers will pay off — literally — starting in October.

As part of its 2006—2007 budget, the Michigan Legislature included a 50 cent pay hike for home health care workers, lifting wages for roughly 120 workers in Hillsdale County to \$7.50. The raise will take effect Oct. 1.

It will also drive home care spending in Hillsdale County 7 percent to about \$590,000, according to a written release from the Michigan Quality Home Care Coalition.

It is the hope that a 50 cent raise will reduce some of the 35 percent turnover rate within the home care workforce, though Wednesday's budget measure still does not include health insurance, paid time off or respite care.

Alex Shulman, spokesperson for the Michigan Quality Home Care Coalition, said the budget measure basically creates a \$7 floor for workers across the state. Those already making \$7 or more, including workers in Hillsdale County, will receive a 50 cent raise. Workers in other parts of the state make between \$8 and \$10 an hour.

"When I first started I was making more than \$500 a month, but the president took that away from us," said Quana Topping, who takes care of her mother at their Coldwater home. "But we're gradually getting it back."

Topping began caring for her mother in 2000, and spends about 16 hours a day cleaning, running out for medication and oxygen tanks and other tasks, though her siblings help out a bit as well.

The coalition cites the efforts of Rep. Bruce Caswell (R—Hillsdale), who chairs the House budget committee for the Department of Community Health, along with the City of Hillsdale and Village of Jonesville councils, and Pastor Craig Pahl of the United Methodist Church in Jonesville.

"This wage increase will help keep Hillsdale area seniors and people with disabilities at home, and out of costly nursing homes," Jonesville Councilperson Ron Hayes said in the written release. "Rep. Caswell and his colleagues should be commended for acting now to help stabilize the home care workforce before the aging Baby Boomer population begins needing care."

The raise will help out Kathleen Aemisegger, who has taken care of her handicapped child at home for 17 years and receives insurance through her husband. Though she was a bit groggy from her own medical work, she did say she hasn't made plans yet for the extra money.

This story was last modified: Thursday, July 27, 2006

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July 28, 2006

Iris Salters

Cutting health benefits won't solve crisis

Shifting medical costs on to workers fails to cure nation's health cost woes



Our nation's health care is in crisis. The shortcomings are obvious, especially in Michigan where corporate giants -- including General Motors -- as well as small-town and public employers chip away at costly health care benefits. They say they can no longer afford to provide health insurance to as many workers or at the levels necessary to attract and retain qualified workers.

So employees are paying more at a time when most can ill afford to do so. Too many go without health care and cross their fingers that nothing serious (read: too expensive) will happen to them or their loved ones.

Shifting medical cost burden

When companies and school districts shift the burden of the cost to employees, they diminish the quality of life for American families -- and they fail to solve our health care problems. It will take more than short-term Band-Aid fixes to heal the situation.

More than 45 million Americans have no health insurance. Of those, nearly half are very poor and unable to pay the high out-of-pocket costs of doctor visits, lab fees or prescriptions.

In Michigan, health insurance cuts have wreaked havoc on employees, not to mention the local and state economies.

Even with insurance, many find it difficult to pay their medical bills. A survey last year by USA Today, Kaiser Family Foundation and the Harvard School of Public Health revealed that nearly 30 percent of Americans said they didn't have enough money to pay for medical or health care in the previous year. Of those, 62 percent had insurance.

Efficient, thoughtful health care is critical to the ability of American businesses to compete internationally. Access to high-quality health care helps to ensure that families in Michigan and the rest of the nation have the necessary elements to sustain a basic quality of life.

Still, at bargaining tables across Michigan, school districts and unions are going head-to-head over health benefits. And where unions do not exist, employees can lose their benefits or insurance coverage at any time -- and many do.

School districts understandably are trying to cut expenses. After all, most public schools are seriously under-funded.

Meanwhile, employees at K-12 schools, community colleges and universities -- teachers, bus drivers, professors, custodians, secretaries and others -- want to maintain health benefits, especially when they've historically sacrificed their pay raises to get or keep these benefits.

Don't attack school workers

Inexplicably, critics have managed to convince some lawmakers -- and more than a handful of newspaper editors -- that cutting benefits is the only solution to help schools balance their budgets.

It doesn't take a doctor to diagnose the error in this line of thinking. We can't expect to "cure" this problem with another Band-Aid.

Cutting benefits is a quick fix that doesn't address the real, systemic problem and, in fact, is devastating to our long-term democratic principles of having access to high-quality care.

The real problem is not that school budgets are taxed; the real problem is that health care for all is too expensive.

Only Uncle Sam can solve ills

The only intervention that will help this crisis is congressional involvement. We need our federal lawmakers to help solve this issue; we need the White House to advance health care as a top agenda item.

Remember when U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich., accompanied seniors to Canada to buy cheaper prescription drugs? Stabenow's efforts shed light on the problem, but four years later, our leaders in Washington have yet to develop a comprehensive strategy to reverse it.

Earlier this month, the U.S. Senate voted to permit seniors to import prescriptions from Canada despite a U.S. Food and Drug Administration ban on importing prescription medicine into the United States. Without the support of the president and the House, it can't become law.

The situation is so grave that some states are creating their own plans. Gov. Jennifer Granholm proposed the Michigan First Health Care Plan to expand affordable health care to all Michigan citizens. This seems to be a step in the right direction.

Some have called for a national health care program, which may or may not be the most workable and fair solution for the masses. But we shouldn't shy from talking about ways to provide good, affordable health insurance to all.

Nor should we shy from talking about ways to stop school districts from balancing their books on the backs of school employees and their families.

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THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Health plan for your pocketbook, too

Thursday, July 27, 2006

Healthy lifestyles could pay dividends, literally, under a new insurance plan offered by Michigan's largest health care underwriter. It rewards employers that promote healthy habits and workers who embrace them, with reduced premiums, co-payments and deductibles. The program could help lessen the escalating impact of health care costs on employers' bottom lines and workers' wallets.

Nationwide, premiums for employer-sponsored health insurance rose by 9.2 percent last year, the fifth consecutive year of increases over 9 percent. Out-of-pocket costs for deductibles and co-payments for medicines are increasing for workers, too.

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, the annual premium health insurers charged employers for a family plan averaged \$10,800 in 2005. Workers contributed \$2,713 toward the cost. That's 10 percent more than they paid in 2004 and about \$1,100 more than in 2000. Such increases show why efforts to rein in health costs are vital, especially at small companies that are finding it difficult to impossible to afford health coverage for their workers and are passing more of the cost on to them or eliminating it as a work benefit.

The new plan offered by Blue Care Network, the HMO affiliate of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, gives businesses a 10 percent discount on what a typical Blue Care plan costs. Blue Care Network has 450,000 members in the state. To participate in its Healthy Blue Living program, companies must promise to keep a smoke-free workplace. They also will be urged to promote physical activity at work and provide healthy food choices in vending machines and cafeterias. Those are not hard tasks.

Workers can get reductions of up to 20 percent in co-payments and deductibles by completing a health risk appraisal. They must meet certain guidelines related to alcohol use, blood pressure, blood sugar, cholesterol, weight and smoking status. People who smoke, are overweight, have high cholesterol or blood pressure can get the reduced rates, too, if they commit to work on healthier behaviors by doing things such as attending free smoking cessation and weight loss programs and taking medicines for chronic conditions.

The discounts will be available Oct. 1. Unlike some health initiatives that punish bad health choices with extra fees and charges, this one uses a carrot rather than a stick to get desired results.

If giving people a financial incentive to take more responsibility for their health produces a healthier, more productive work force, everyone wins. An ounce of prevention can be worth a pound of cure.

The Grand Rapids Press

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BRIAN DICKERSON: Where'd my daddy go? Justices sent him away

BY BRIAN DICKERSON
FREE PRESS COLUMNIST

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It hadn't occurred to me that the black robes of judicial office endow the mortals who wear them with supernatural powers. But I'm considering that possibility in light of a recent paternity case in which Michigan's highest court took the only father a 7-year-old Kalamazoo boy has ever known and made him disappear -- poof! -- just like that.

Nobody is denying that Michael J. Barnes Jr. exists or that he is the biological father of McClain Michael Barnes, the son his girlfriend Kim Jeudevine gave birth to in February 1999. The elder Barnes still has the home pregnancy test that announced McClain's imminent arrival, and the surgical gown he was wearing the day he witnessed his son's delivery.

Jeudevine acknowledged Barnes' paternity in an affidavit of parentage signed after her son's birth and obtained a birth certificate listing Barnes as the father. The couple never married, but they lived and raised McClain together until the summer of 2003, when they broke up.

Barnes' right to a continuing relationship with the son he sired and raised for nearly 4 1/2 years wouldn't be an issue except for the fact that the boy apparently was conceived while Jeudevine was still married to another man, James Charles.

Charles filed for divorce from Jeudevine in July 1998, about eight months before she gave birth to McClain. He says he didn't even know his wife was pregnant when their divorce became final that November, and he told the divorce judge (at a hearing Jeudevine declined to attend) he had no reason to believe she conceived a child during their two-year marriage.

Charles has never had anything to do with the son Jeudevine gave birth to in 1999, and no one, including Jeudevine herself, has ever argued that he should.

But in 2003, when Barnes sued Jeudevine for visitation rights after she told him he could no longer see McClain, Jeudevine's lawyers argued that only Charles, the ex-husband who'd taken no part in the boy's conception or upbringing, had standing to assert any paternal rights.

A Michigan Court of Appeals panel unanimously rejected that reasoning in 2005, ruling that although McClain was conceived while Charles and Jeudevine were still married, their divorce decree had specifically excluded him as the father of any children she bore. Since all the available evidence pointed to Barnes as the biological father, the panel concluded, he was clearly within his rights to seek parenting time with McClain.

Barnes, a 45-year-old telephone lineman who now lives with his new wife in rural Van Buren County, wept for joy when he got the news of his appellate court victory. But Jeudevine's attorneys appealed, and Wednesday, by the narrowest possible margin, the Michigan Supreme Court agreed that only Charles, the dad who never was, has standing to sue Jeudevine for visitation with McClain.

"The affidavit of parentage and the birth certificate do not rebut the presumption that the child was an issue of [Jeudevine's] marriage to Charles," Justice Elizabeth Weaver wrote for the court's 4-3 majority. "Charles is and remains the child's legal father."

Charles, needless to say, has no intention of suing for custody of a boy he has never had any reason to believe was his. Jeudevine, 49, could force the issue of paternity by suing Charles for child support. But she's unlikely to do so, since

the likely consequence would be a court-ordered DNA test excluding Charles as the father. If Charles were thus excluded, the distraught Barnes would have a new legal opening to assert his own paternity claim, which is the last thing Jeudevine wants.

"What is clear is that, for a practical matter, the child can expect to have no father in [Jeudevine's] former husband," Justice Marilyn Kelly wrote in a bitter dissent.

Justice Stephen Markman went further, in a separate dissent joined by Justice Michael Cavanagh:

"The majority here rejects a father who welcomes the opportunity to take responsibility for his child, and who has acted as a father for more than four years, in favor of no father at all," Markman wrote.

Barnes' attorney says he'll petition state justices to reconsider the case. But barring an about-face by one of the four justices in the majority, his only recourse would be a long-shot appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court.

So for all practical purposes, the only thing Kim Jeudevine has to worry about is how to answer when her son asks why she and a bunch of state Supreme Court justices conspired to banish the only father he has ever known.

Boy, I'd hate to have to answer that one. But, hey, maybe Justice Weaver and her colleagues can make little McClain disappear, too.

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Police: Dad shot mother, burned their baby alive

Prosecutor calls it 'the most vicious crime' he's seen in 14 years

Of The Oakland Press

PONTIAC - As family members wailed and cried, police officials recounted the horrific details of the brutal slayings of a mother and her infant daughter.

The woman's boyfriend, 30-year-old Jimmie Reed Jr. of Detroit, sat stoically in court as he was charged with a spate of felonies in the deaths of Markeda Byas, 31, and her 2-month-old daughter, Arctavia Reed - also his child. Detectives say Reed - who has no criminal history - confessed to the slayings, saying he believed Byas was cheating on him and had given him a sexually transmitted disease. He also balked at paying child support for Arctavia.

"This is the most vicious crime, in my 14 years as a prosecutor, that I've had to review," said Assistant Oakland County Prosecutor Sydney Turner. "He burned alive a 2-month-old infant. Prior to that, he put a bullet through her 31-year-old mother's head."

Detective Darrin McAllister said he was deeply affected by the crime. He said that at about 8 a.m. July 20, Reed - who had a key to Byas' apartment in the Wind Song complex off Walton Boulevard - shot Byas in the head and left Arctavia with her dead mother for about 18 hours. In the early morning of July 21, Reed returned to the home, doused both Arctavia and Byas with gasoline and lighted a match, as the baby screamed.

The bodies were found in Byas' bed. Byas died of the gunshot wound; Arctavia died of smoke inhalation.

"It appears he was trying to cover up the crime scene," McAllister said.

Reed led a double life, McAllister said, with three or four girlfriends on the side and children by other women. At least one of Reed's girlfriends was in court. On Monday, Reed came to the Pontiac Police Department to speak to detectives, and he confessed to the crime.

Reed was charged Wednesday before 50th District Court Judge Leo Bowman with first- and second-degree murder, arson and felony firearms.

He's being held without bond and will be back in court Aug. 8. If convicted, Reed will spend the rest of his life in prison.

He requested a courtappointed attorney.

Family members of Reed and Byas were in court Wednesday, but they

declined to comment. Byas also had a 7-year-old son who was staying with relatives at the time of the killings.

Byas worked as a laborer in Auburn Hills and was known to her neighbors as a good mother who was quiet and shy. She originally was from the Flint area.

The deaths of Byas and Arctavia were the city's ninth and 10th homicides this year.

"I commend the job that these detectives did," said Police Chief Valard Gross. "Our hearts go out to the family. We can't believe someone would do a vicious act like this."

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Article published Jul 28, 2006

Group moves forward with homelessness plan

Members of the Monroe Network on Homelessness want to shatter the image of homelessness as an exclusively urban problem affecting a limited number of people.

Meeting with local agencies Thursday morning in the Monroe County Courthouse, they prepared to launch a countywide 10-year plan to end homelessness, discussing the ways it creeps into crevices of places sometimes thought to be immune to the problem.

The network has secured a \$10,000 grant from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) to begin the plan. Organizers say the effort is one of 83 such plans in the state. Members announced plans to apply for the grant last spring.

Thursday, members and supporters of the network emphasized the financial - as well as the moral - cost of homelessness as they called on community members for help.

They said they needed data on the county's housing situation, as well as ideas for solutions, from area agencies.

"We need data and we need research," said Charlotte (Charlie) Mahoney, previous president of the United Way of Monroe County Board and the meeting's facilitator.

They also cast the problem of homelessness in a broad economic context.

"We need to bring more jobs to our state," said state Rep. Kathy Angerer, D-Dundee. "Homeless people are homeless because they can't afford to keep a roof over their heads."

Stephanie Zorn Kasprzak, executive director of the Monroe County Opportunity Program (MCOP), noted the way the problem affects children, particularly those close to home. She said nearly 50 percent of the homeless in Michigan are children, compared to a national average of 40 percent. She also said 170 homeless students are enrolled in the county's public schools.

Speakers cited plans enacted in other cities, from New York to Nashua, N.H., as they speculated on what a blueprint to end homelessness in Monroe County might look like.

Joseph Grifka, chairman of the county's Network on Homelessness, described a recent plan in New York. Striking the note many of the participants emphasized, Mr. Grifka said New York City planners made headway on homelessness by housing 4,500 people without burdening the community with any extra costs.

"It didn't cost any more to create the housing and put the support team in place than to leave them languishing in the street," he said.

He and others contended that the strain homelessness puts on health care and other resources was as at least as expensive as housing and social services.

The New York plan, he said, was part of a "housing first" model that focused on permanency rather than short-term shelters.

During a brief question-and-answer session, audience members noted some problems they said were still unaddressed in the community, such as funding for adults to prepare for the General Educational Development exam. Two attendees also said they hoped the community would support increased hours for public transportation.

When the issue of transportation was raised, Terry Beurer, director of the Monroe County Department of Human Services, noted a project under way to sell "reliable automobiles at low cost."

The network is required by the state to have a draft of the plan in place by Aug. 31 and an actual blueprint by Oct. 24.

Sandie Pierce, the continuum care coordinator for the Network on Homelessness, is in charge of the project. Monroe County Commissioner Jerry Oley and Monroe Community Mental Health Director Jane Terwilliger were among the speakers at Thursday's meeting.
